**Fair Isn’t Always Equal**

By Rick Wormeli

*Chapter 1:*

**Abstract:**  
Chapter one of Rick Wormeli’s Fair Isn’t Always Equal discusses what exactly differentiated instruction means to the students, parents and teachers. It helps the read get into the “mind-set” of using differentiated instruction in the classroom. “[*Differentiated instruction*](http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/subject/di_meeting.phtml) is doing what’s fair for students.” (3) There are many ways to use differentiated instruction in class. Some are as simple as allowing the students to use a TI-83 calculator when the lessons involves advance and abstract concepts. This allows the class to keeps its momentum instead of the students getting stuck on the calculations and errors. However, differentiated instruction does not mean that the teachers make the learning easier. “It provides the appropriate challenge that enables students to thrive.” (4) Some parents and community members don’t fully understand the concept of differentiated instruction and think that it provides a crutch to the students. They think that the teachers are babying the students. The books provides a great example of comparing two students where one receives differentiated instruction and the other does not but the assessment is still fair. There are two students that sit in the back of the classroom and one wears thick glasses because he is nearsighted. The teacher asks both students to read the text that is written on the board which is written in small letters. To make things equal, the teacher removes the nearsighted student’s glasses and still requires him to read the text. The student is unable to read the board despite many efforts. Many people would think that this makes it harder for the student but it actually makes it easier. Without the glasses the student has an excuse to not do the assignment. When given the glasses, the student is compelled to read the board and understand what it says. He actually thrives instead.  
  
**Synthesis:**  
Ashley Godbout worded the purpose of differentiated instruction in a way that’s easily understood, **“**Differentiated classes are challenging because they keep students engaged and hold students accountable for their learning.” As a class we all agreed that differentiated instruction is not making the students learning easier but instead it actually enhances their learning. The class agreed that using differentiated instruction does not “baby” the student. Russell Warren clearly explained some of the benefits for using this type of instruction in the classroom. “School shouldn’t be a place where students have to abide by their teacher’s rigid instructions, or learn how to take a standardized test because that’s the only way they’ll really be graded, or expect the world to be so regimented.” Students can breathe easier by knowing that they are [learning](http://www.sde.com/di/what.asp) as a direct result from their decisions.

*Chapter 1:*

This chapter was discussed how important it is to have a positive mind-set about using Differentiated Instruction in the classroom. It showed that there are many different types of differentiated instructions and almost all of us encountered this instruction when we were students from kindergarten to high school. Some may think that using differentiated instruction is giving the students a crutch that they can lean on throughout their school years. They argue that they are not truly learning because they are not learning on their own or without help. That is completely false, because using differentiated instruction actually helps make the classroom fairer for every student. This way, there is not a student that is more advantaged than another just because they learn differently. A way for students to be able to appreciate their success is to make them learn without the support so that they can struggle and realize how much better they do with the added help. Having differentiated instruction affects students further than just your specific classroom. Differentiated instruction helps students all the way past school and to graduation. It helps the students understand how they learn and they can understand what works better for them specifically. With this knowledge, they can go on through life with a better advantage. This type of instruction helps them focus and helps them breathe easier knowing they are getting the help they need in order to obtain their full potential in school. As a teacher I need to be able to incorporate differentiated instruction in my classroom. This way my students will receive the help that they need in order to succeed in my classroom. If they know how they learn, than they will be able to carry that knowledge with them for future classes.

*Chapter 2:*

This chapter explained that knowing what defines mastery is essential in understanding if your students are truly learning and understanding the material. What defines mastery is different for every teacher and also does depend on how long they have been teaching for. There are many ways to asses if your students have learned the material but does that really prove if they have mastered it? Mastery is more than knowing and using what has been taught to them but it is also being able create their own problems using what has been taught to them. This chapter compared mastery to the six facets created by Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins in their book Understanding by Design. The six facets are: Explanation, interpretation, application, perspective, empathy, and self-knowledge. These are all things that students are supposed to be able to do with the information they are getting from their teachers.

As a teacher, I am supposed to not only asses my students progress but I am supposed to make sure that they can take the information I’ve provided and use it outside of the classroom. As a new teacher I will have to keep in mind what I am teaching my students because there are many factors that play a role in the school curriculum. I have to keep in mind if my material is in line with the state standard tests and also know that there is more information than there is time in a school year. This is something that not only first year teachers have to know but that experienced teachers must also remind themselves of.

*Chapter 3:*

This chapter discussed many different topics within differentiated instruction and assessment. It showed that it is very important for the students to know what the point of the curriculum is. They should know what they are supposed to learn first before any lessons even start. The book gave an example of how to show the students the end game of their subject. If students are given the final assessment/test before they even start lessons, than whenever they learn something new it will jog their memory back to the assessment. They will know that the idea is important to know and something they will be tested on since they already had a sneak preview of the final assessment. For the students it will be exciting to learn the answers since they will want to strive to get the correct answers so their grade on the test will be shown as improvement. The book emphasized expectations of the students and the teacher. Students should know what is expected of them before the class so that they have an idea of how the next year or semester will play out. If they know and understand the expectations, than they won’t have to try to guess as the year progresses.

As a teacher I must make sure my students know what is expected of them before I start the lessons. I must also remember that no one is ever always on their game every day, all day. If students are doing great throughout the week but when it is time for the test, some might do worse than if they were having a better day. There are many factors that can influence someone’s day and it will affect everything they do. If we penalize the students because of one test or quiz they did badly on, than we are not letting them show up their true potential. We are not letting them show us how well they can do when it is a good day. That is why many assessments are needed throughout the year so they can be second chances for some students and a progression indicator for others. Without this, I would not be assessing my students fairly and letting them show me what they can really accomplish.

*Chapter 4:*

The three important types of assessment are portfolios, rubrics, and student assessment. Portfolios allow teachers to collect the students work throughout long periods of time. This give the teacher’s a collective amount of student work that is full of grades to look back on and track progress. The portfolio can only include just one years’ worth of student work or I can be a multiple year portfolio of ongoing collective work. There are many types of ways to physically keep the portfolio including an actual folder or just having an electronic version that is easy transferable to multiple electronic devices. Rubrics are great for “assessing and reporting student achievement.” (pg. 44). A rubric must be examined in terms of content, clarity, practicality, and technical qualities/fairness. Teachers must identify exactly what the essential content and skills are and what is acceptable evidence of those skills for the students to show or demonstrate. The teachers must then write what the highest level of performance is and if they want the rubric holistic or analytic. They then must decide what the label will be for each performance level in the rubric. Teachers must then write the description for each level and they have themselves a rubric. Student Self-Assessment makes the student and teachers set goals and ask them to analyze their own responses. This asks students to review their own work and this helps them see their own improvement and progress. These three assessments are great for the teachers and the students because it really makes both parties evaluate the students and themselves. Evaluate what the exact goal is and what is acceptable demonstration and how they have progressed through the year or multiple years.

*Chapter 5:*

This chapter defines tiering as “primarily emphasizing the adjustments we make in assessments according to students’ readiness levels, not interests or learner profiles.” (56) To start tiering then teachers must first have high expectations for the students and must expect them to be able to demonstrate proficiency. It’s easier to start at the correct level task and raise the challenge then to start will low expectations. It is also helpful if teachers list out every skill or information that the students need to use in order to meet the needs of the task. There should not be any low, medium or high tiers because instead teachers should be only responding to those specific groups that are struggling. Tiering does not mean changing every part of the task but just specific parts because most of the times, struggling students can still complete the other parts without much problem. There are many ways to increase and decrease the complexity of an assignment and the chapters gives a detailed list to choose from. The book gives many examples on how to tier lessons that include; learning contracts/menus, tic-tac-toe boards, cubing, summarization pyramids, RAFT(S), and one-word summaries. Tiering does not make things unfair for those students that already have mastered the skill or task. It does not baby those students that are still having trouble. It gives those advanced students to do and assignment that will challenge them and further their understanding. It gives those struggling students a chance to achieve the required task in a different manner than their fellow classmates.

*Chapter 6:*

This chapter emphasizes using multiple ways of creating tests and prompts. It stressed that there should be a variety of the traditional tests that include; true/false, matching, multiple choices, essay, short answer, etc. There should also be a variety of nontraditional tests that include; drawings, analogies, demonstration/performance, integration of more than one topic, analyzing real-life applications, etc. Using this kind of a variety the teachers will get a better picture if the students are really mastering the subject content or not. If teachers use true/false questions, than there will always be the trouble trying to decipher the answer from those students that have a sloppy handing writing. The chapter suggests that with students in fifth grade to tenth grade should have an exception from the traditional multiple choice questions. Instead of using the words, “All of the above except C and E,” “Which of these is NOT associated with…,” “None of these” (78) because these type of questions do not actually assess if the students have mastery or not. As teachers we have to make sure the prompts we provide the students are clear. We have to make sure that the students know exactly what is expected of them in answering the question. It is pointless to have five questions that are all similar because teachers can see if the student truly understands in two or three questions. Timed tests are not a good way to see the mastery because it will just show how much they can cram into an hour or smaller time limit. I had no idea how much thought and effort must go into each test and assessment. It seems that most teachers just use the same traditional method but I know that if am constantly using different ways to test then I will have an effective classroom. I have to give my students chances to show me that they truly know the material but I have to help them along the way.